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Leaders in Civil War Days

John T. Frederick

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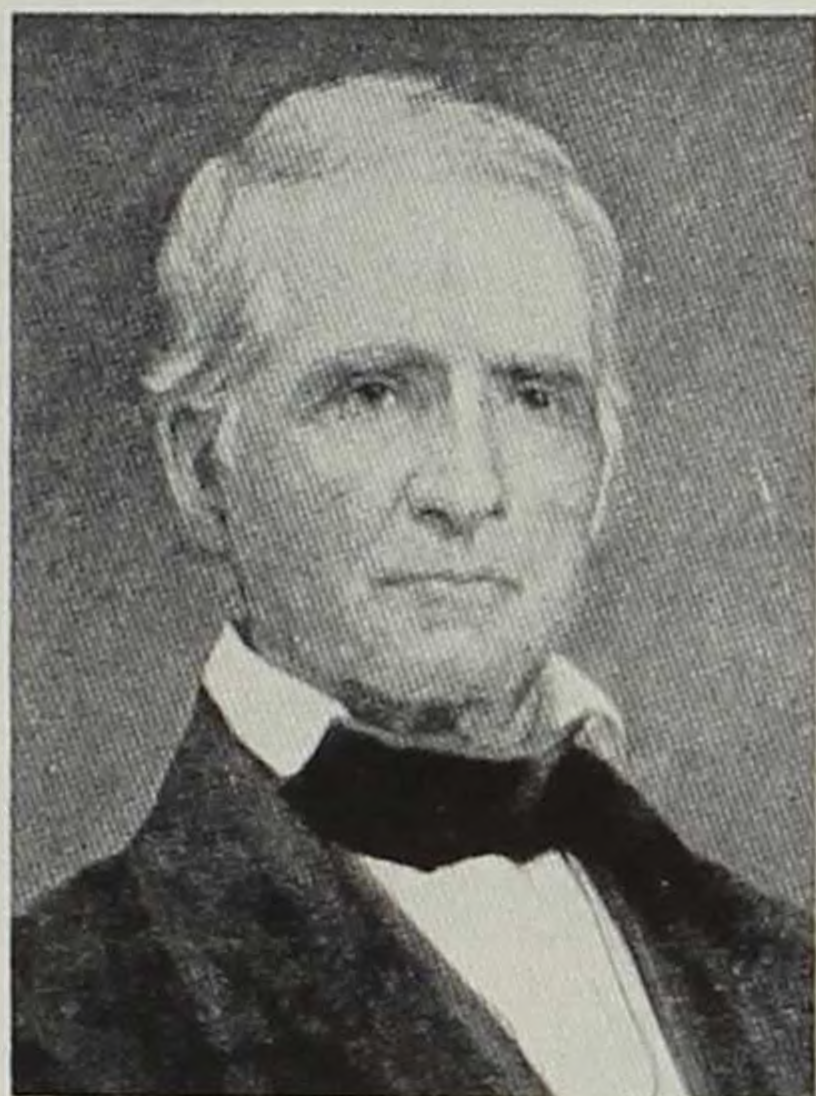
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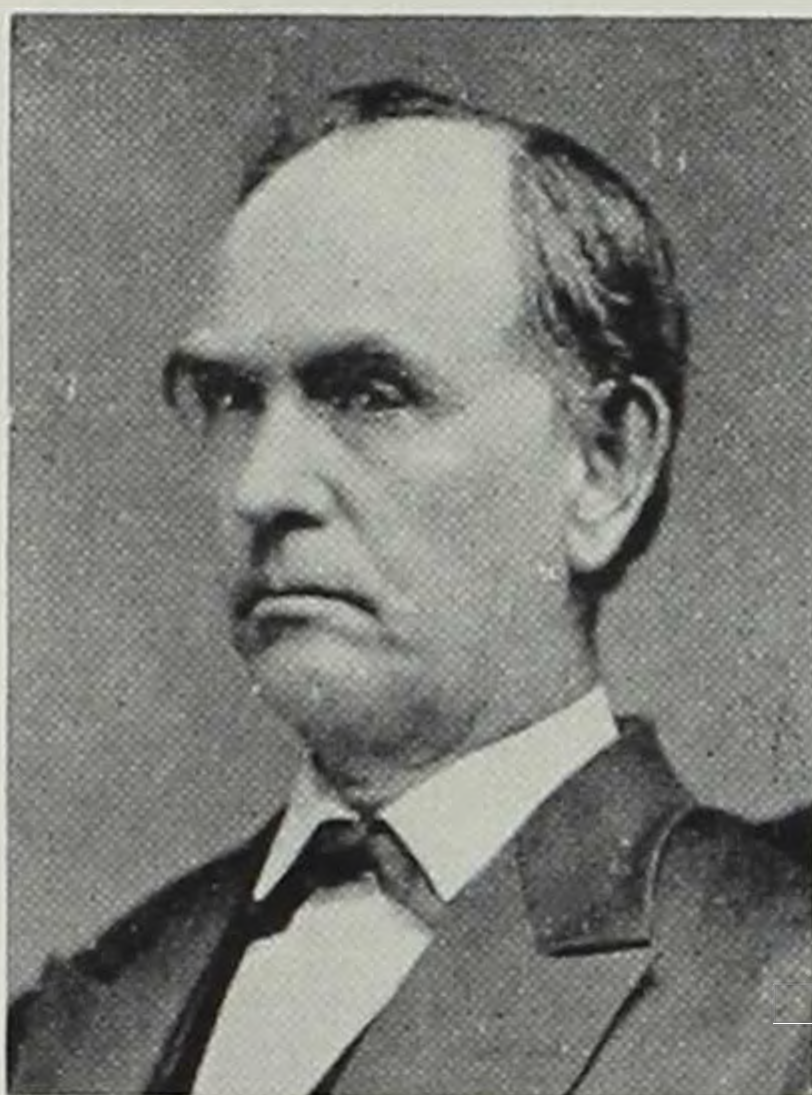
Leaders in Civil War Days

The men most influential in Iowa during the two decades from 1850 to 1870 had for the most part, like their predecessors of the era of Iowa Territory and early statehood, gained experience and reputation before they came. A partial exception to this rule was James Harlan, who was destined to serve three terms as a United States Senator from Iowa — with a brief interlude as Secretary of the Interior. He was a power in Iowa politics almost from his arrival in the state in 1846 to his death in 1899. His biography, written by Johnson Brigham, was published in the Iowa Biographical Series in 1913. Harlan, born in Illinois but brought up in Indiana, came to Iowa as a young schoolmaster. He performed valuable service as principal of Iowa City College (incorporated in 1843); as Superintendent of Public Instruction for the new state of Iowa; and as president of the Mt. Pleasant Collegiate Institute (now Iowa Wesleyan College).

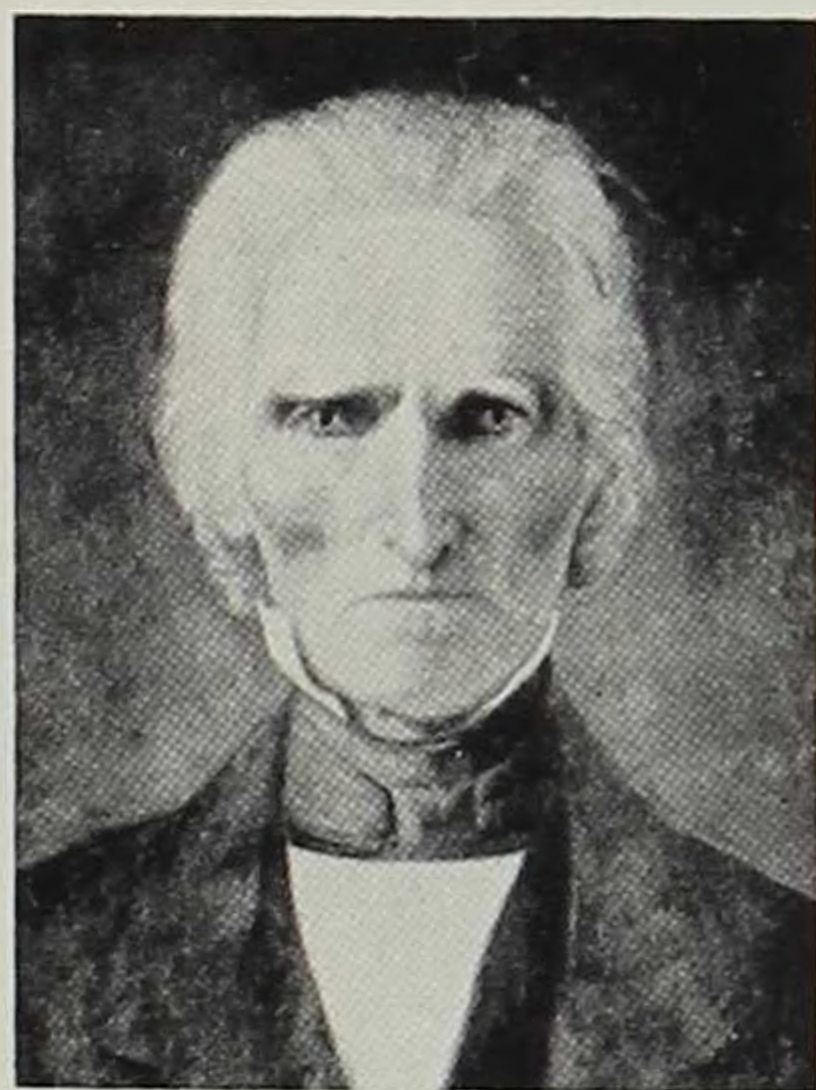
Harlan's campaign for the office of state superintendent had brought him into touch with political leaders, and in 1855 he was elected to the United States Senate. A technical irregularity in the election enabled the slavery forces in the Sen-



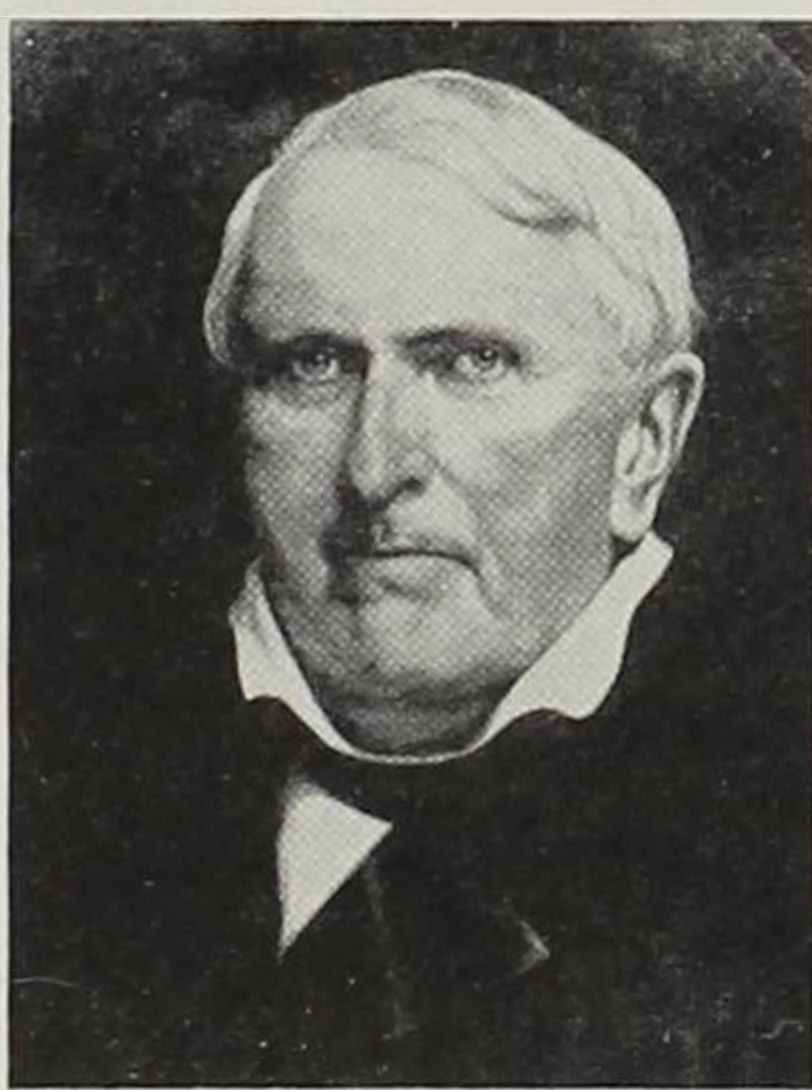
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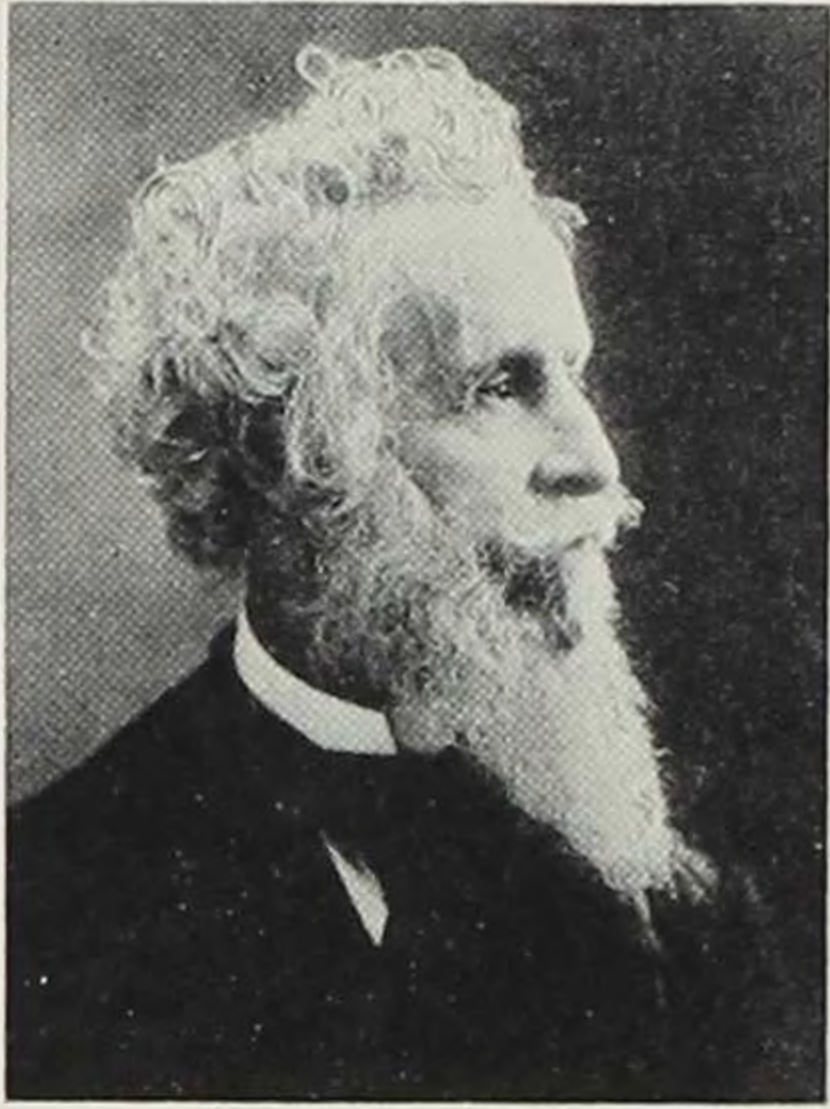
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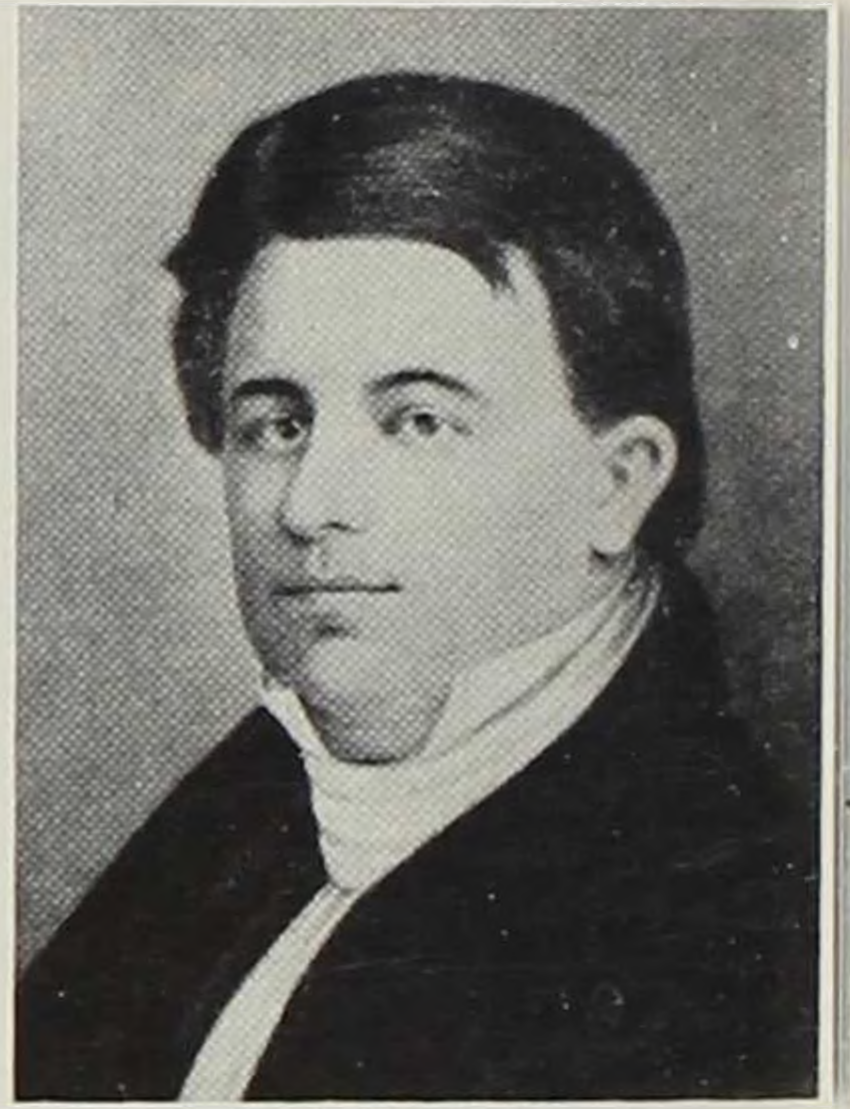
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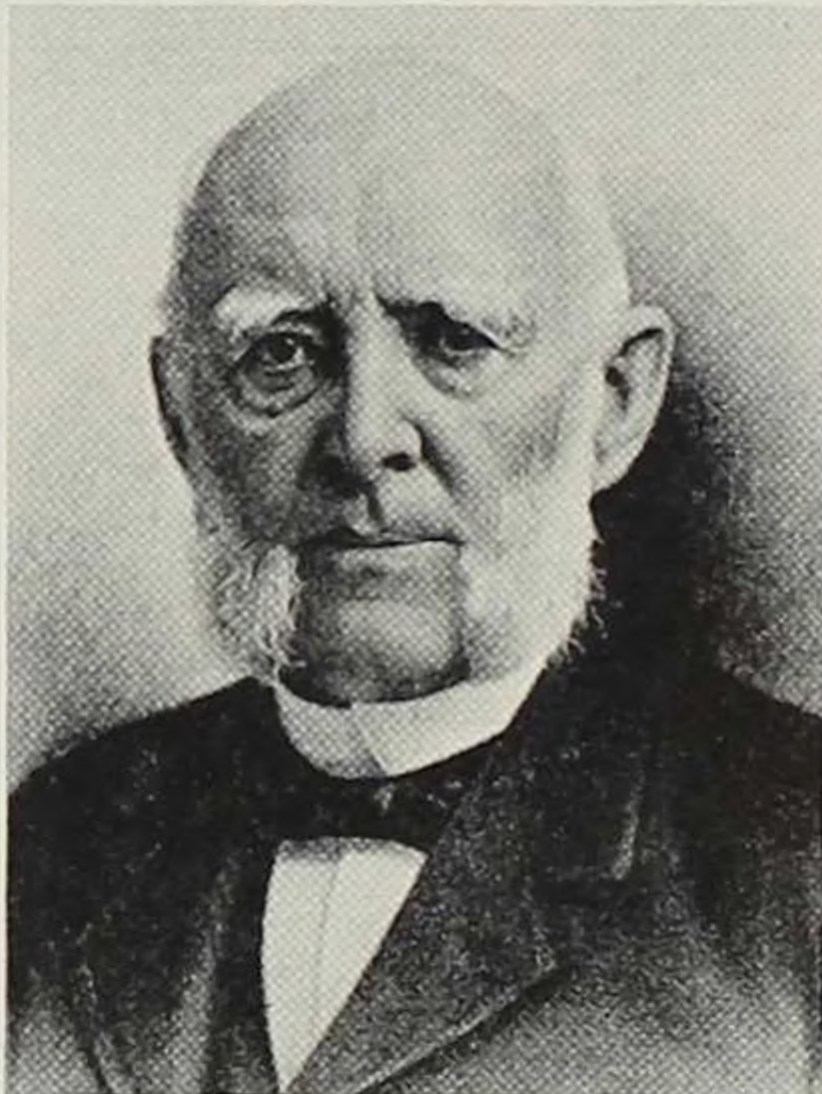
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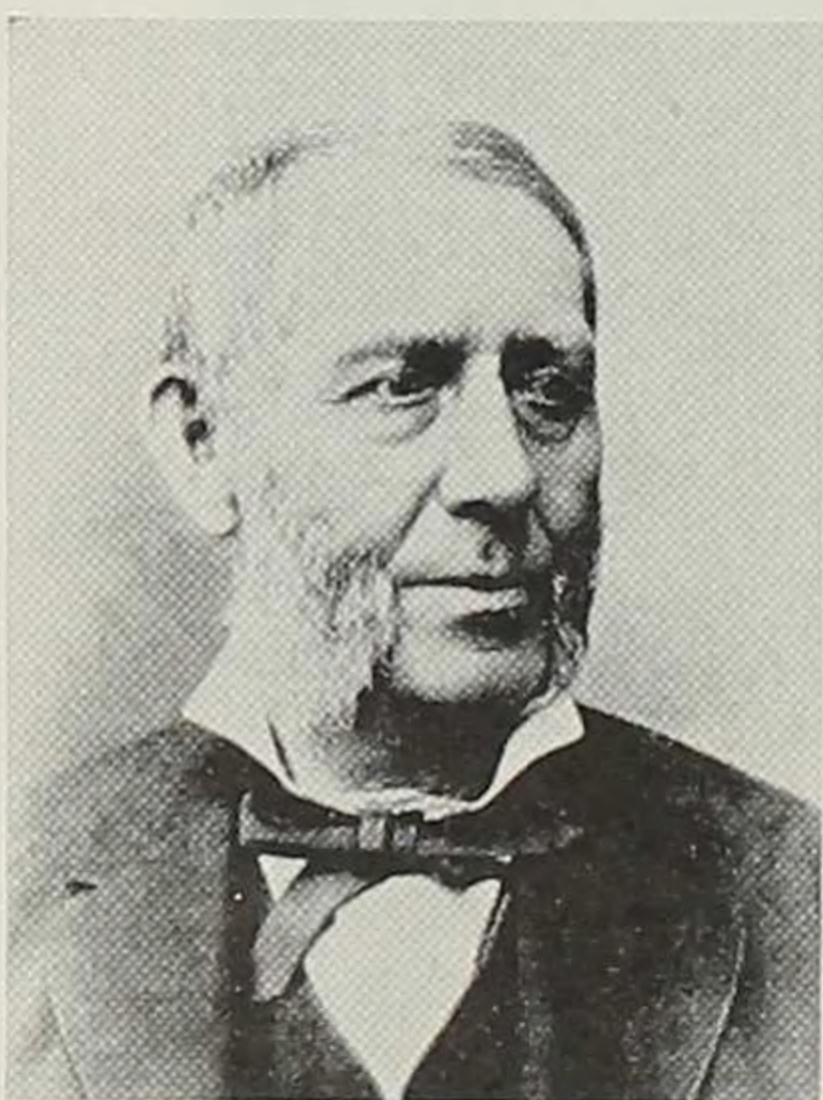
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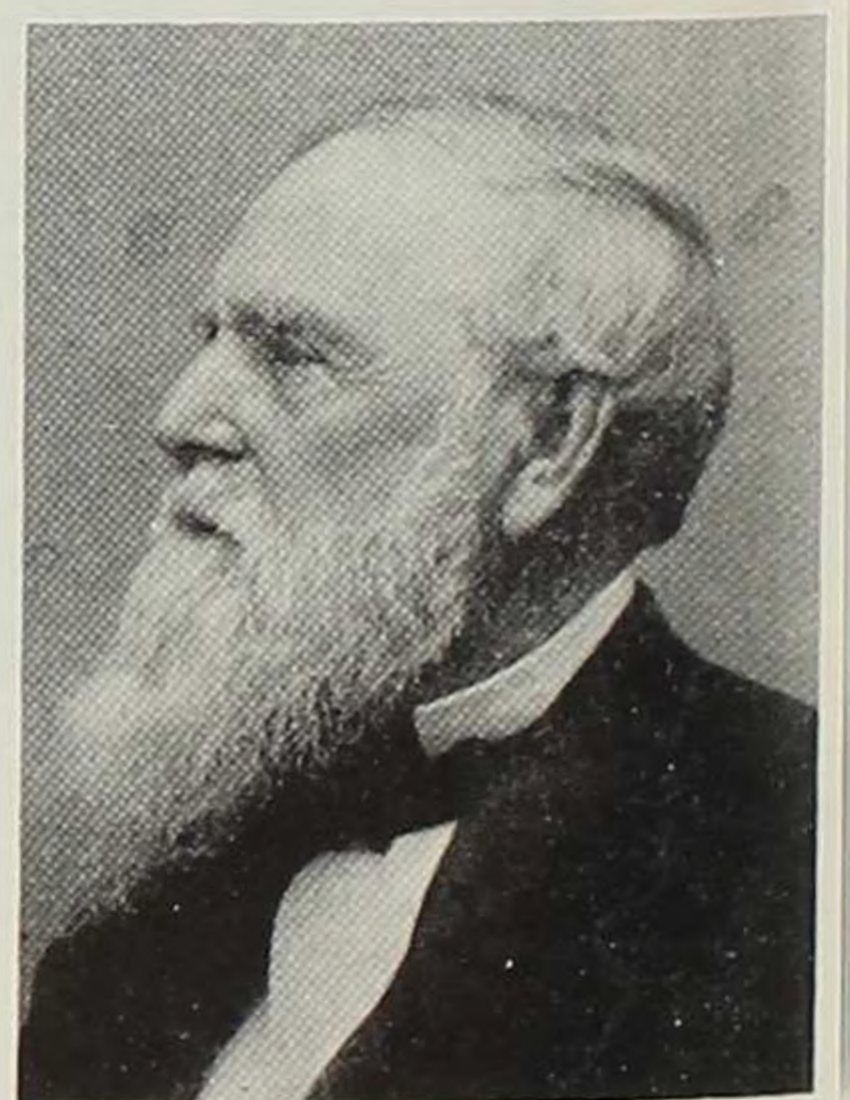
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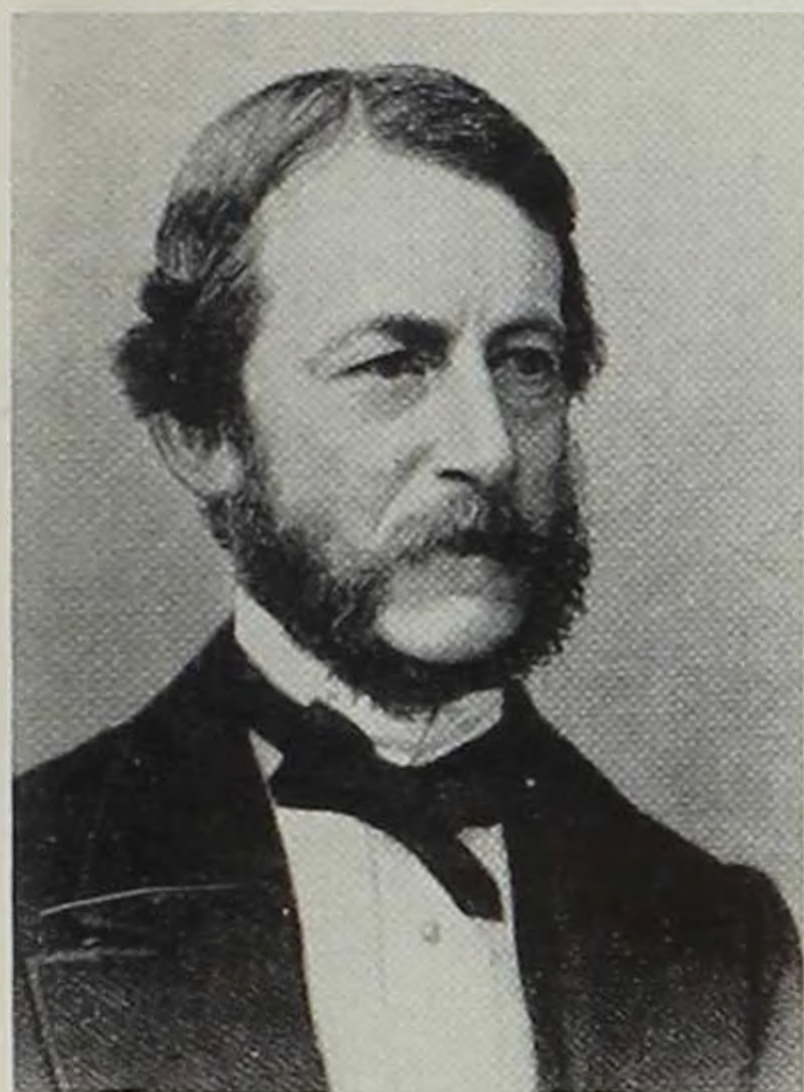
PETER ANTHONY DEY



SAMUEL JORDAN KIRKWOOD



JAMES HARLAN



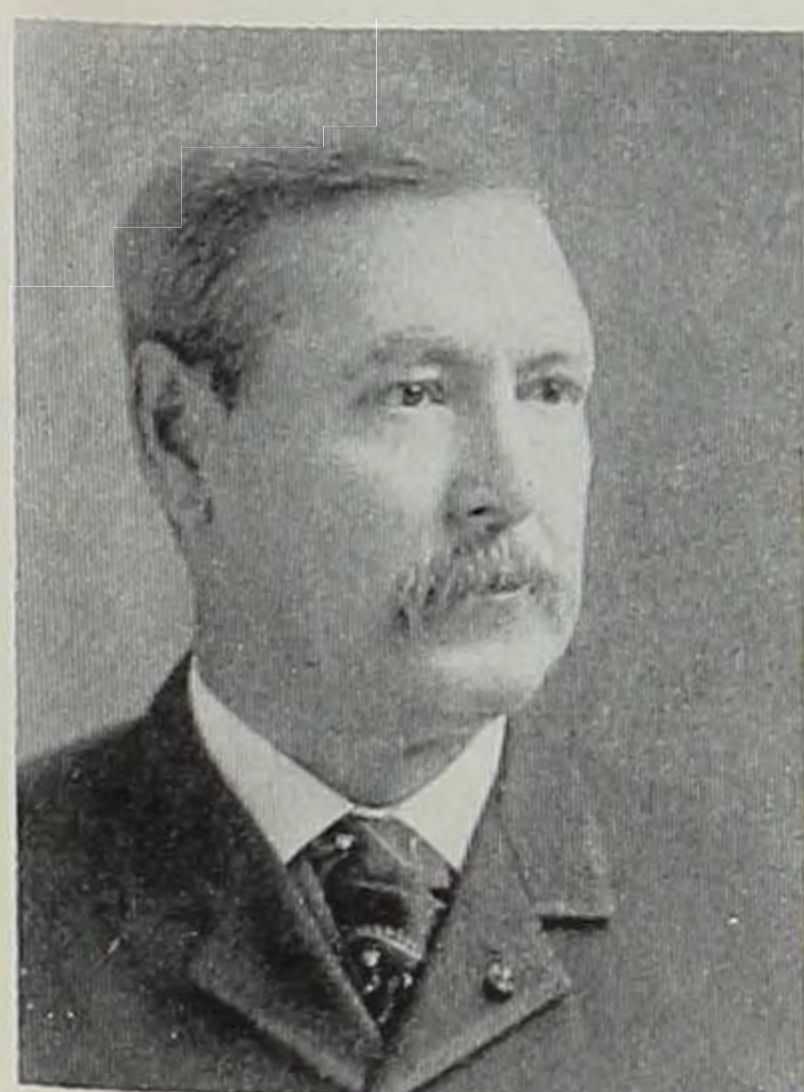
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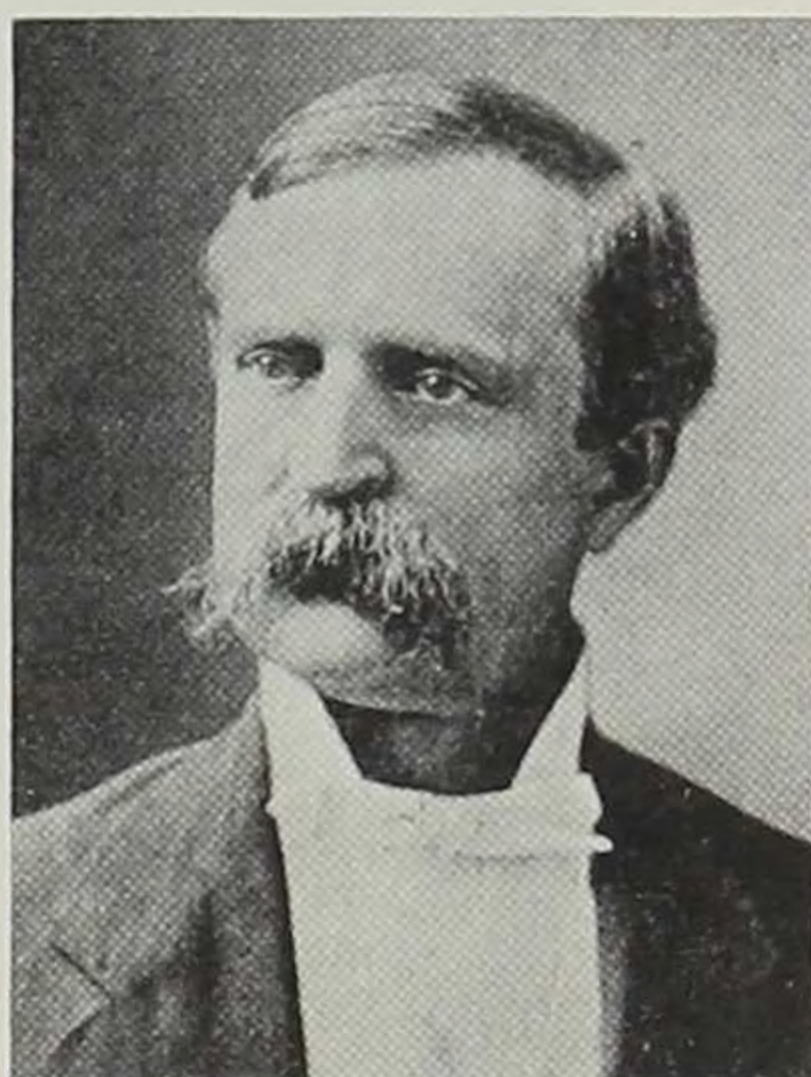
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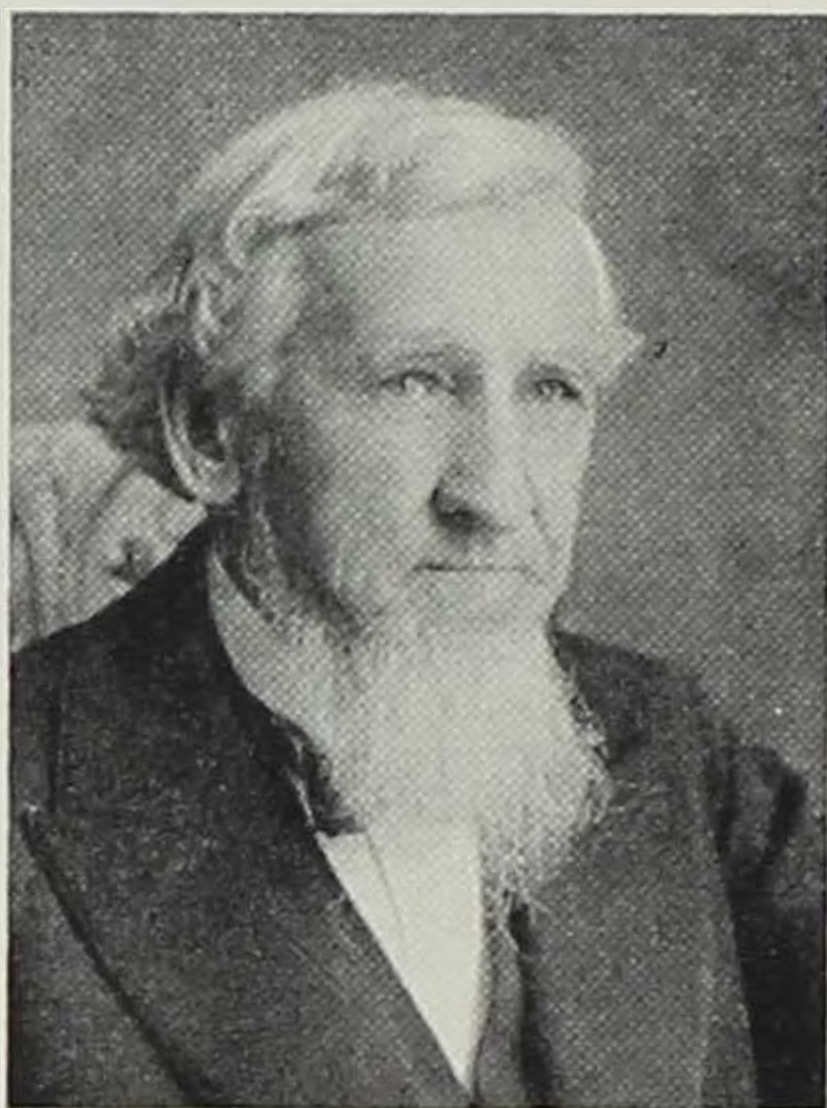
WILLIAM BOYD ALLISON



WILLIAM PETERS HEPBURN



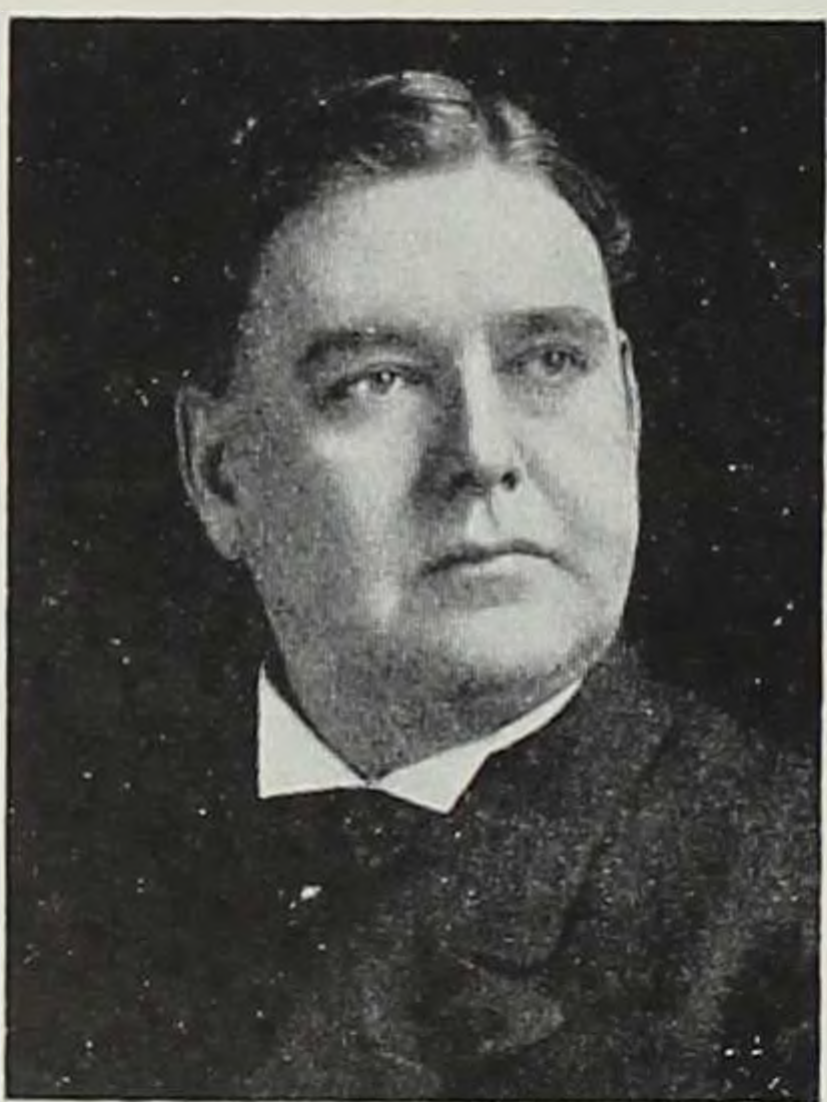
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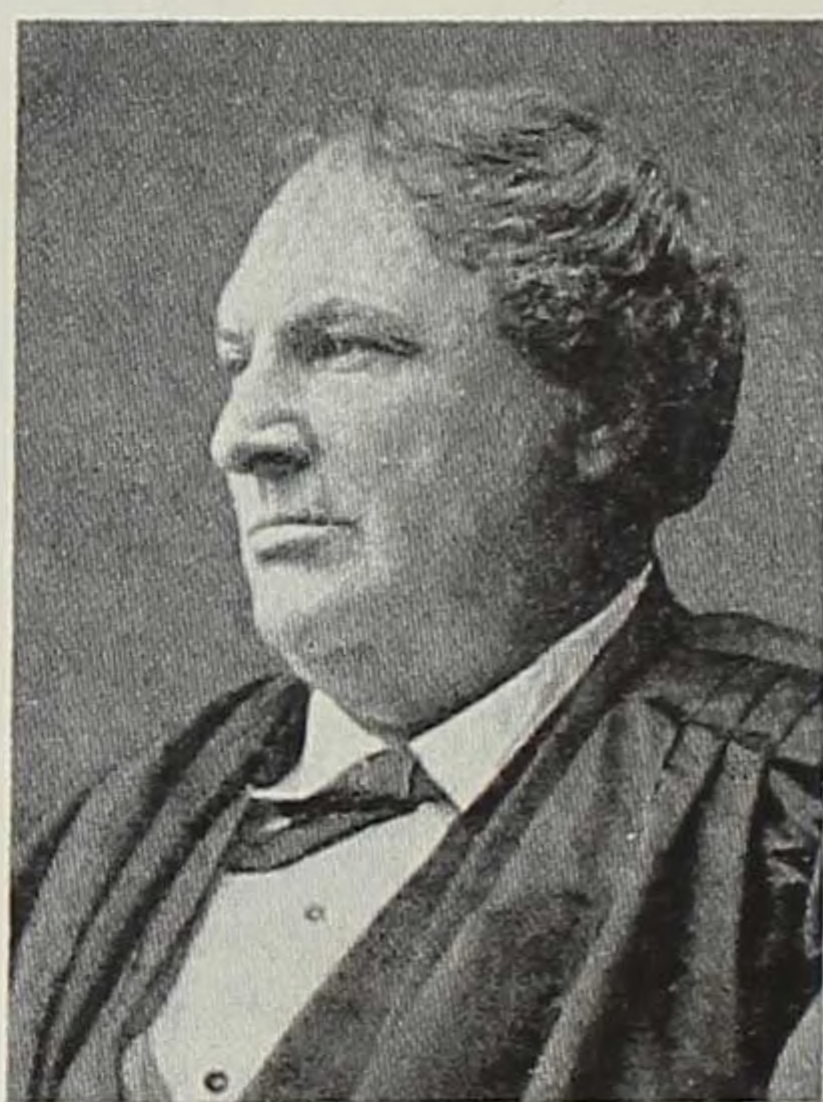
LEONARD FLETCHER PARKER



JOSIAH BUSHNELL GRINNELL



ROBERT GORDON COUSINS



SAMUEL FREEMAN MILLER

ate, after Harlan had distinguished himself as an anti-slavery leader, to unseat him in 1857 — but only for three weeks, when he was triumphantly returned to the Senate by unanimous vote of the Republicans in the Iowa legislature.

Harlan's career in the Senate during the war years was marked by most inflexible opposition to disunion and by frequent criticism of the administration. He and his family became close friends of the Lincolns, however. In 1868 Mary, Harlan's daughter, became the wife of Robert T. Lincoln. She was still living when Brigham wrote his biography of her father, and he acknowledges special obligation for her help. Just before the end of the war Lincoln persuaded Harlan to accept appointment as Secretary of the Interior; Harlan did not take office until after Lincoln's death. He soon came into collision with President Andrew Johnson, and resigned after little more than a year in the Cabinet. His appointment had been designed to effect economies and reform in a department burdened by useless office-holders. One of the hundreds of employees dismissed by Harlan was the poet Walt Whitman, a circumstance which has made Harlan's name known unfavorably to thousands of readers and admirers of Whitman. In Brigham's opinion, Harlan was fully justified in his action.

Harlan returned to the Senate in 1867, aided in the attempt to impeach President Johnson and in

the shaping of reconstruction policies, and defended President Grant in 1871 against charges that he had usurped congressional powers. In 1872 he was defeated by William B. Allison for the Republican nomination for the Senate, largely as a result of charges of dishonesty which had followed his service as Secretary of the Interior. Brigham, in his generally admiring though well-documented biography, shows reason to believe that Harlan was not guilty of these charges. In his last years Harlan prepared an *Autobiographical Manuscript and Papers*, used by Brigham in writing the biography.

One of the most interesting and engaging figures in Iowa's history is Samuel Jordan Kirkwood, the subject of a biography written by Dan Elbert Clark and published in the Iowa Biographical Series in 1917. Kirkwood was born in Maryland in 1813, spent some years of his boyhood in Washington, D. C., and emigrated with his father to north central Ohio in 1835. He helped his father clear a farm, taught country schools, and in 1841 began to study law at the growing town of Mansfield. He served for four years as prosecuting attorney of Richland County, and participated in the prolonged Ohio Constitutional Convention of 1850-51. In 1855 he left a prospering law practice to move to Iowa City, where relatives of his wife had preceded him.

In Iowa City Kirkwood became not a lawyer,

but a successful miller and farmer. His first appearance as a public figure was an unpremeditated speech at the convention which met in Iowa City on February 22, 1856, to organize the Republican party in Iowa. In the same year he was elected to the state senate from Johnson and Iowa counties. It is interesting to note that in his first period of public service in Iowa, Kirkwood was one of those chiefly responsible for the introduction and adoption of the bill establishing the State Historical Society of Iowa — with an initial appropriation of \$250!

In January, 1858, Kirkwood journeyed to the new capitol at Des Moines, like other legislators from the eastern part of the state, "in the old Concord stage" that "day and night wallowed through the great snow drifts that filled the sloughs and ravines of the bleak unsettled prairies" between Iowa City and Des Moines. The seat of government was then "a little shabby frontier town of less than 3,000 inhabitants. . . . The new state house had been located on the east side of the river a mile or more from the hotels, and the streets leading to it were, for the most part, simply wagon tracks made through a long stretch of low, swampy river bottom. One long straggling walk of native lumber boards, warped and slippery, could be seen strung out lonesome and wabbling in the direction of the new brick capitol."

When Kirkwood became the Republican candi-

date for Governor in 1859, an opposition newspaper made the mistake of referring to his ticket as "the Plough-Handle Ticket," and another advised him to stay at home among his hogs! The Republicans were not slow in making political capital of these attacks, among farm voters. The campaign was a bitter one, marked by a series of joint debates between Kirkwood and his Democratic opponent, Augustus C. Dodge, chiefly on the issue of the extension of slavery.

Clark's biography gives the reader a dramatic picture of the problems that Kirkwood faced as Governor, especially after the outbreak of the Civil War, and of his courage, candor and vigor in dealing with them. His gravest problem was the provision of equipment and supplies for the tens of thousands of Iowans who came forward to volunteer. In August, 1862, he wrote Secretary Stanton demanding blankets; he wanted permission to organize at once into regiments the volunteer companies that were ready. "If I don't get this permission," he declared, "I will have to volunteer myself and leave the State." Kirkwood distinguished himself especially by his concern for the welfare of Iowa troops in the service. After one of many personal visits which he made to "camps and hospitals where Iowa men were to be found, in order to judge for himself concerning their treatment and needs," a soldier taking part in the siege of Vicksburg wrote home, "The Gover-

nor is the same in 'Dixie' that he is in Iowa."

Kirkwood's public career was rounded out by a short term as United States Senator in 1866-67, an unsought third term as Governor in 1876-77, four years as United States Senator, 1877-81, and brief service as Secretary of the Interior following appointment by President Garfield in 1881.

The long and useful career in Iowa of Peter Anthony Dey, who came to Iowa in 1853 and lived until 1911, raises a question as to whether his biography, written by Jack T. Johnson and published in the Iowa Biographical Series in 1939, should be included in the group of those dealing with men whose most distinguished contributions were made in the mid-century or with those chiefly identified with later decades. It seems probable, however, that the most brilliant and history-making services of Dey were rendered in those first few years as an Iowan. A graduate of Geneva College and already an experienced construction engineer at the age of twenty-eight, Dey was largely responsible for the first survey of what is now the route of the Rock Island line across Iowa. He played a similarly important part in other railroad surveys farther west.

Peter A. Dey served for twenty-four years as a member of the Board of Curators of the State Historical Society of Iowa, and from 1901 to 1909 as president of that body. The importance of his contribution to the development of the Society,

both in its material establishment and in its policy and purpose, is summarized by his biographer in the statement: "Without the firm convictions and the unswerving support of President Dey, the State Historical Society of Iowa could not have made the transition from the collecting of relics and reminiscences to scholarly research and publication."

JOHN T. FREDERICK